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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 KHARTOUM 001117

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NSC FOR BPITTMAN AND CHUDSON, ADDIS ABABA FOR USAU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2018
TAGS: [KPKO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [AU](#) [SU](#)
SUBJECT: PRESIDENT BASHIR DANCES THROUGH DARFUR TO A
MODERATE TUNE

REF: KHARTOUM 1107

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Classified By: CDA Alberto M. Fernandez, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) Summary: President Al-Bashir used a whirlwind visit to the capitals of Darfur's three states July 23-24 to highlight a total rejection of possible ICC indictments against him. He also offered his most inclusive and personal vision ever of a peaceful and united Darfur while freely admitting that "mistakes were made" in the past. He also highlighted a new Darfur initiative to be headed by First Vice President Kiir of the SPLM. The President also met with UNAMID officials and IDP delegations and offered to solve their problems. End summary.

A POOR START AS CHARGE WALKS OUT

¶2. (SBU) After being told that his request to visit disgruntled former Darfur rebel (and currently "Presidential Assistant") Minni Minnawi in Darfur was denied because of President Al-Bashir's July 23-24 trip to Darfur, CDA Fernandez was invited to accompany the President on his Russian-staffed IL-62 to the three state capitals in Darfur. Also invited were all P-5 COMs (with only France refusing to go) plus UN SRSG Qazi, UNAMID JSR Adada and a handful of assorted African, Asian and Arab Ambassadors (Libya, UAE, Kenya, Congo, South Africa and India). Al-Bashir was accompanied in his travels by two close cronies, Minister of Finance Awad al-Jaz (who holds a Ph.D. from the US) and Minister of Presidential Affairs Bakri Salih. FVP Salva Kiir detailed two loyalist SPLM ministers - Minister of Humanitarian Affairs Harun Run Lual (not to be confused with his deputy, ICC indictee Ahmed Harun) and Health Minister Tabitha Butros to accompany the President.

¶3. (SBU) Al-Bashir's tour began with a ceremonial arrival at El Fasher Airport. The heavy security at the airport and into town contrasted with the President's relish in mixing with well-wishers as he drove slowly standing in an open bed truck with North Darfur Governor Kibir around a dusty soccer field to the cheers of 3-5,000 well-wishers and curious onlookers. Many school children and government employees were there while others came for the party. The public ceremony consisted, as with other stops, of a series of speeches by tribal representatives, mayors, the governor and ending with the President, interspersed with the Master of Ceremonies leading the crowd in anti-Ocampo (and often anti-Semitic, and sometimes, anti-American) chants. Some of the choice rhymes being "Ocampo, you coward, you are an agent of the

Americans," and "Jews of Khaibar, beware, the Army of Muhammad is coming" (referring to the difficult relations the Jewish community of Khaibar had with the Prophet Muhammad). After one official speaker, allegedly representing the Fur tribe, denounced President Bush as "the real war criminal who should be before the ICC" because of Iraq, Afghanistan, Abu Ghuraib, and Guantanamo, CDA Fernandez walked out of the ceremony. He informed the protocol chief/minder accompanying the diplomats that "if you want to insult us, maybe you shouldn't have invited us and this seems a strange way for you to try to influence the P-3" (lesser insults were launched against the British and French although not by Al-Bashir personally). CDA listened to the rest of the ceremony in the parking lot.

MISTAKES WERE MADE

¶4. (SBU) Perhaps because of the walkout, the next speaker, North Darfur Governor Kibir limited his criticism to vague "enemies of Sudan." He also warmly praised UNAMID, foreign NGOs working in Darfur and "friends in the diplomatic community who visit us." Al-Bashir began his remarks by noting that he had been in El Fasher on the same day last year and that things had improved. He admitted that there had been real problems in Darfur and that "injustices and wrongs had occurred." He praised Darfur's tradition of tolerance and faith, "which flourished even before America existed." Al-Bashir highlighted the initiative just beginning by all of Sudan's political parties to come up with a Darfur road map. He noted that all of the people of Darfur will share in this better future, "all of the tribes, IDPs, both signatory and non-signatory rebel groups". He also mentioned that some of the JEM rebels captured in the May 10 Omdurman attack would

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be released soon. The President promised that the government will build the "National Salvation Road" which will connect Darfur to Khartoum by a paved, all-weather highway. He sarcastically noted that "we had wanted an American company to do this, but they said that it could only be done with a friendly Sudanese Government, which meant a puppet regime." He added that the government will work to provide services and to achieve peace and that the efforts of Ocampo were inconsequential and marginal to what Sudan would do.

¶5. (C) Al-Bashir and his entourage then proceeded to meetings with IDPs and UNAMID. Both meetings were behind closed doors. CDA Fernandez spoke with several of the IDPs who were in the meeting with the President and confirmed that they were indeed real IDPs (from Abu Shouk Camp). They said that the IDP reps had been able to raise their concerns freely with the President. The priorities for them centered on individual compensation, security (both in IDP camps and in their places of origin) and the need for development. Al-Bashir had responded positively but vaguely. The IDPs bit their tongues and then remained silent. "What more could we say, we heard all of this before, the question is, will he do anything?" The IDPs confided that the "ICC announcement against Al-Bashir was nice but removed from our real problems and concerns today in Darfur." JSR Adada and UN SRSG Qazi later described their meeting with Al-Bashir as cordial and friendly. He expressed his condolences for the July 8 attack on peacekeepers and offered to be of help in facilitating the mission of the UN in Darfur. UN staff told polchief later that the UN had handed over a list of priorities to Al-Bashir (including allowing the US company PAE to continue working in Darfur) and that Al-Bashir had reportedly agreed to follow through on all of the UN's suggestions. Adada told CDA Fernandez on July 23 that one major problem, the backlog of hundreds of UNAMID shipping containers stuck in El Obeid, is more the fault of the UN than the Sudanese.

THE DEVIL CAME TO DARFUR

¶6. (SBU) In Nyala, the capital of South Darfur, an even larger, effusive crowd danced and swayed with the President to patriotic songs. Several children walked around with dummies of the ICC prosecutor hung in effigy. The President's speech was much more statesman-like. The anti-American rhetoric in the warm-up was considerably toned down. He began by recalling that "the happiest days of my life were spent in Nyala" as a young army officer. Al-Bashir again admitted that there had been marginalization, injustice and suffering in Darfur, "the devil came to Darfur" and brother turned against brother. Despite the problems, his government had made real progress - when he took over in 1989 there were six schools in all of Darfur. By 2003, there were 159 schools and three universities. "Then the rebellion came, and development stopped." Al-Bashir once again lauded the new all-party initiative for Darfur as an opportunity to settle all differences. He called on "my brother Minni" (Minnawi) to return to Khartoum and "we will implement the DPA together".

¶7. (SBU) Al-Bashir made an appeal to those who are still in rebellion, who are in exile, "including in Paris" (Abdul Wahid Nur) to make efforts to achieve peace, "we know there is no military solution for Darfur, only a political solution, and we will exclude no one." Al-Bashir made a strong religious appeal for inter-tribal unity and tolerance adding that "any Muslim who kills another Muslim will surely go to hell." He added that all Darfuris are brothers and belong to the same faith and tradition of ethnic tolerance. He identified the two major problems of violence in Darfur now as "gangs of bandits or rebels robbing NGOs, stealing food trucks, creating insecurity" and "ongoing tribal violence which must stop" (South Darfur especially is wracked by blood feuds between pro-regime Arab tribes fighting each other - "janjaweed" battling for spoils and political primacy). At dinner that evening, Al-Bashir laughingly teased CDA Fernandez, "I understand that you were angry at what was said about your government and your president in El Fasher, but imagine how I should feel. Look what they say about me and my government!"

A NEW DEAL FOR THE FUR PEOPLE?

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¶8. (SBU) For the July 24 trip to Geneina, capital of West Darfur, the party had to break up into three small planes (two UNAMID plus one SAF, for the President) because the Geneina airfield is too short to accommodate large jets. A much heavier security presence was apparent in this state capital, which borders Chad and which has been the scene of much recent fighting and instability. Two T-55 tanks guarded the airfield and army, police and NISS troops were positioned every 100 feet along the President's route into town. The route passed the entrance to a Geneina IDP camp, whose curious inhabitants gazed sullenly if impassively at the visitors. A rollicking, careening motorcade of dozens of SUVs, pick up trucks and technicals loaded with cheering young men - many armed, some in uniform, some waving posters of Al-Bashir - escorted the President and his party into a soccer field. Several hundred armed horsemen, caparisoned in wild splendor, welcomed the President, holding aloft their horsewhips while an Mi-24 helicopter gunship made four passes over the enthusiastic crowd. Unlike Nyala and El Fasher, this was a much more militarized crowd with many men in uniform - SAF, border guards, police, NISS, popular defense units - and less women and children.

9 (SBU) Except for one lone chant about "Ocampo the coward, the agent of the Americans," there was no reference by anyone to the United States. Several speakers spoke relatively freely about suffering and marginalization in Darfur (while

denouncing Ocampo). The pro-government Sultan of the Masalit criticized the ICC but called for greater attention to peace and reconciliation in Darfur (the Sultan later privately told CDA Fernandez that the Masalit are "being crushed" between the rebels and the regime and that Al-Bashir represents 'the devil you know' in Darfur). The elderly Dimangawi (a traditional Fur noble) of Zalingei denounced Ocampo and the ICC, but noted the great suffering of the Fur. He called on the President to provide better services for Jebel Marra, including better electricity and communications services, better roads, and support for Zalingei University. He also said that the Jebel Marra region (the Fur heartland) deserves its own state - Central or Middle Darfur - a call which was lustily cheered by the crowd. Al-Bashir then rose from his seat, waved off his bodyguards and embraced the Fur leader. The Governor of West Darfur, the youthful former SLA rebel commander Abu Gasim Al-Haq, said that Ocampo hurts the peace process and that past peace accords need to be fully implemented. He also underscored the need for connecting West Darfur to the outside world, by road and air, and for additional reconstruction and development projects.

NO MORE BURNING OF HOMES!

¶10. (SBU) Al-Bashir then expanded on previous themes in the two other Darfur speeches. Sudan is committed to peace in Darfur, it is a strategic decision and there is no other way to solve the conflict, not through military action. The people of Darfur, all of the tribes and groups, are an essential part of winning the peace in the region. Peace is needed for development, it is the key. IDPs must be allowed to return home and "we don't want to see again people being burned out of their homes" (the fact that he was probably saying this to men who have been burning peoples' homes is, perhaps, significant). He repeatedly highlighted Darfur's centuries-old tradition of tolerance and tribal harmony, noting that Muslims need to treat other Muslims well, and that "the devil came to Darfur," but we don't fear the devil, we fear and follow God." Since the Americans were off limits, Al-Bashir bitterly criticized the "crocodile tears" of the French, "who created a million martyrs in Algeria." He noted sarcastically the French hypocritically backing up Ocampo and contrasted it with French depredations against the same Masalit tribe in 1911-1913 (when the French colonial authorities killed the Masalit Sultan Taji al-Din, burned his capital Darjil to the ground, and annexed much of Dar Masalit to what is now Chad) that they now claimed to want to rescue.

¶11. (SBU) President Al-Bashir responded to the Dimangawi, "yes, we will provide more support to Zalingei." As for the request for a new state (where the Fur would be an absolute majority), "this is a good idea and we support this." He added that such a change would require amending the interim constitution which would need the support of the SPLM, "for Central Darfur and Western Kordofan" (the latter being a possible state for the Misseriyya Arabs to mollify them for losing sway over Abyei). He added that the problems of IDPs

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and refugees needed to be solved, "we want them to return home." They need security so that they can return home - both security for them and essential services need to be provided for them. Al-Bashir noted that when he first came to Geneina 40 years ago, there was no water in the town. Donkeys were needed to transport water to the new hospital and a memo had to be submitted to Khartoum, almost a thousand miles away, to requisition the donkeys. "Now you have power at the local level to decide what to do, aside from major projects." He reiterated support for building a paved highway all the way from Khartoum and expanding the airfield into an international airport.

¶12. (C) Later that evening, CDA Fernandez spoke by phone to disgruntled Presidential Assistant Minni Minnawi, somewhere

in the wilds of North Darfur. Minnawi said that the GOS was making extra efforts to woo him but was also plotting to assassinate him. He said that he knew nothing about allegations in the media (allegedly by some of his commanders) of bombings by SAF of Minnawi-controlled areas while Al-Bashir's visit was going on. He admitted that he was in talks with non-signatory rebel groups - URF and SLA/Unity - but not in order to wage war. Al-Bashir's own parting remarks to CDA upon arrival in Khartoum were "I hope you liked better what I said now. I meant what I said."

¶13. (C) Comment: Al-Bashir was clearly energized by the trip and by the enthusiastic, if regime-orchestrated, dancing and cheering crowds that welcomed him. His enthusiasm was unfeigned as he joined in the party. Behind the scenes, he was relaxed and jovial with his entourage, sharing jokes and clearly engaged with those around him. Both IDPs and UNAMID officials who met him privately were pleased, if cautious, about possible progress as a result of his meetings with them. He certainly spoke publicly in stronger and more specific terms than ever before about the "injustices" of Darfur, about IDPs and refugees, and about a political solution to this long festering crisis. But in the end these are just words, even if positive and long overdue ones. He did signal some more significant actions, however. Promises to UNAMID, if kept, could facilitate deployment. The new, all-party initiative he talks about (which is headed by First Vice President Salva Kiir) breaks some past NCP taboos: it formally involves the SPLM in Darfur, it involves opposition parties like Umma in the discussion on a brokered peace, it makes allowances for IDP, civil society, and native administration voices to be involved in a Darfur peace process -- all three of these steps were NCP redlines as recently as the aborted Sirte talks of October 2007 (the NCP then sticking to the idea that peace in Darfur can only come as a result of a deal solely between rebels and the NCP -- similar to how the CPA was negotiated).

¶14. (C) Comment continued: The President's endorsement of a possible "Central Darfur" state centered on Jebel Marra is an intriguing concept as it seeks to redress a historic wrong caused by Khartoum: the dilution of the voice and role of the Fur people who give Darfur both its name and much of its identity. But like much in his speech, the challenge will be whether this regime that has so little international credibility can translate promises, slogans and excuses into actual policies on the ground and do so quickly. Despite the cheapshots, the regime clearly wanted to send the message to the P-5 that it intends to take decisive, positive and overdue action in Darfur. Hanging over all of this is the probability of an ICC indictment of the President. As noted in septels, the regime is well prepared for both escalation or further concessions -- or an uneasy mixture of both -- as it decides which is a better guarantee of its core concern: holding on to power in Sudan. End comment.

FERNANDEZ